

UNDERGROUND STORAGE TANK-LEAKING UNDERGROUND STORAGE TANK PROGRAM

PROGRAM OVERVIEW:

EPA's underground storage tank (UST) and leaking UST (LUST) program—referred to as the UST program—works closely with our partners to prevent UST releases from occurring, detect releases early, and clean up releases that have occurred. Our partners include states, territories, and the District of Columbia (referred to as states); tribes; UST owners and operators, who are primarily small businesses; and other UST industry. Even though states are the primary implementing agencies, EPA provides national leadership, technical expertise to address national issues, grant money to help states operate their UST programs, and direct implementation in Indian country.

Underground storage tank systems are located in almost every community in the United States at retail facilities, such as service stations and convenience stores, and at non-retail facilities. Approximately 53 million people—or roughly 16 percent of the population—live within ¼ mile of an active UST facility. UST systems throughout the United States store billions of gallons of petroleum products, and the average age of active USTs is approximately 25 years. Releases from USTs are a major source of contamination to soil and groundwater, the source of drinking water for nearly half of all people living in the United States.

As of March 2020, the total active UST universe consists of approximately 542,000 petroleum USTs and 3,500 hazardous substance USTs, located at approximately 197,000 facilities. Since the inception of the UST program, approximately 558,000 releases have been confirmed and 494,000 cleanups completed. Even though almost 90 percent of all releases have been cleaned up, approximately 64,000 releases remain. And despite best efforts to prevent releases, approximately 5,500 new releases are confirmed each year. Since 2008, EPA, state, and credentialed tribal inspectors conducted over 1.1 million on-site inspections at federally regulated UST facilities. Inspections increase compliance, which can help reduce UST releases.

GOALS:

EPA's strategic plan includes a goal for the UST program to complete 56,000 cleanups over five years, and we have an annual goal of 11,200 LUST cleanups. This is an aspirational target, and we work closely with our state partners to achieve as many cleanups as possible. While we typically achieve closer to 8,000 cleanups per year, we continue striving for more. A number of factors impede the UST program's ability to achieve the goal. Many releases are technically challenging, lack money for cleanup, or are abandoned. Yet each year, EPA works with its state partners to identify and initiate backlog reduction strategies to address those challenges.

Although not expressed as a goal in EPA's strategic plan, the UST program views continued efforts to reduce the number of releases that occur each year as an essential goal, and a complement to the cleanup goal.

STATUS AND PRIORITIES:

Prevention priorities—implementing the 2015 UST regulation and reducing releases

EPA updated its original 1988 regulation in 2015 to enhance UST system operation and maintenance. States have been working to incorporate those regulations and obtain approval to operate the UST program in lieu of

EPA—called state program approval (SPA). Ensuring our state partners complete their regulations and obtain approval remains a key program priority.

EPA is working with state and tribal partners to improve compliance nationwide via training, compliance assistance, and outreach.

Meeting the 3-year on-site UST inspection requirement is another priority for the program. Inspections, and associated enforcement, are essential to ensuring compliance. Inspections also serve to provide compliance assistance to owners and operators. The UST program also uses innovative enforcement tools when necessary to ensure compliance.

We are committed to safely accommodating emerging fuels, such as biodiesel and higher-ethanol gasoline, for example E-15, by ensuring UST systems and components are compatible with fuels stored. Storing fuels in incompatible UST systems can result in systems not functioning correctly, jeopardizing the integrity of the UST system, and potentially causing a release to the environment. In addition, corrosion is appearing on metal components inside USTs storing diesel fuel. Corrosion can affect UST equipment functionality and could lead to releases.

Cleanup priority—reducing the backlog of releases remaining to be cleaned up

To increase the number of cleanups completed, EPA and states identify state-specific strategies and implement initiatives to address barriers and complete more cleanups. In addition, EPA directly oversees cleaning up releases in Indian country, as well as identifying and implementing opportunities for reducing the backlog of releases awaiting cleanup.

EPA encourages states to use innovative technical solutions to speed up and optimize assessing and cleaning up all sites, including those that are in more challenging geologic settings. To that end, we develop technical guidance, conduct training webinars, and share information about effective assessment and cleanup technologies with our state and tribal partners.

Owners and operators are required to clean up UST system releases; cleanup costs are typically paid for by their financial responsibility mechanisms. Because many owners and operators use state funds as their financial responsibility mechanism, we evaluate the financial soundness of state cleanup funds and work with states to correct deficiencies. This ensures UST owners and operators have access to effective financial responsibility mechanisms to help pay for cleaning up UST releases. EPA also monitors compliance related issues and challenges with other financial mechanisms, such as insurance.

We continue exploring opportunities to partner with other EPA programs, such as Brownfields, to clean up lower priority LUST sites. When sites are cleaned up and ready for reuse, the result can mean improvements in communities because of productive redevelopment of abandoned and under-used properties.

KEY EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS:

☒ Congress
 ☒ Industry
 ☒ States
 ☒ Tribes
 ☐ Media
 ☐ Other Federal Agency
☐ NGO
 ☒ Local Governments
 ☐ Other (name of stakeholder) _____

LEAD OFFICE/REGION: OLEM

OTHER KEY OFFICES/REGIONS: REGIONAL OFFICES